Abstract

The Internet is the newest telecommunication system that has been developed in modern society, and with it comes many varied effects that it has on the minds of the people that use it.   It is important to take a step back and look at the underlying causes of the development of the Internet users minds.   This essay will delve into the question of why people sacrifice privacy in order to achieve social validation, in order to analyze the progression of the human population as a whole, as well as the individuality that is being affected by it.   The goal, through analyzing and observing online social media data, is to find out how the evolution of human psyche is evolving, as well as to find any conclusions as to whether the trend of social media is leading to good development and goals, or otherwise.

Analysis

When looking at why people sacrifice their privacy in order to achieve social validation, it is important to break down to the roots of the topic, the human nature behind it.   Why do people require social validation or desire to be identified with and by people at all? This is more than just a want that people have but a need to belong.   When people are alone they tend to create groups or join them, they enjoy relating to other people based on common interests.   When people are in a group they feel empowered, happy and are more at ease with themselves.

The theory of evolution sheds some light on this need; in the past, not being a member of a group made the chance of survival very low.   Groups of people hunted and worked together to create food and shelter for each other.   Members performed roles which others were incapable of, which benefited the group as a whole, but would be otherwise unavailable if living individually.

Without the help of the others, performing all the acts necessary to survive in the wild was a burden, and often times too much for individuals to cope with.   Another important reason to belong to a group was protection.   This has stayed true in modern societies but the need to be in a group for food and shelter has long since passed.

According to Maslow, humans have eight basic needs and they are our motivational factors. These eight needs are: physiological needs, need for safety, need for love and acceptance, need for self-esteem and respect of others, knowledge and understanding, need for aesthetics and beauty, self-actualization, and transcendence.   Physiological is the most basic of human instincts, the need to breath, sleep, eat, drink, procreate, sleep, stay warm, and excrete.   Safety, the second need, is delivered to western society through the government, policing and human rights.   This need, one of feeling secure in a world full of insecurities, is not generally at risk due to the extensive amount of thought and action that has gone into it.

The first two needs are generally accommodated just by being in western society, making the need to be accepted and be loved a more heightened desire in such a culture.   This need to belong is a prime motivation for people and they will go to great lengths to achieve this goal of belonging.   With belonging also comes the cost of your anonymity and when that is taken away you will also put your privacy at risk.   In the past, this wouldn't be such an issue, but more and more it has become a real threat.

The Internet has created many ways for you to put your name and face out there.   Whether it be through YouTube, facebook or any of the other websites that thrive off of user-generated content,

people are almost always using them for social validation whether the users know it or not. These websites provide proof that people are willing to put their personal privacy on the line for social validation. Many older people wouldn't dare to even buy anything from the Internet, yet their children and grandchildren are posting pictures of themselves, their personal information and names on the Internet for anyone to see. These sites even seem aware of their use or abuse of the human psyche by using words such as: like, group, and follow. Also, by letting people view the demographics that enjoy what they are looking gives people another way to validate themselves. It is clear that the Internet has provided the perfect means for the need to belong and people are willingly using it at the cost of their privacy.

It is interesting that people are valuing the third and fourth levels of Maslow's eight basic needs, more than the second one. It is also scary, as social validation starts by curiosity but can expand quickly into an addiction. The Internet is a fast and ever growing resource and having so much to explore can sometimes reduce the want to stay safe, and increase the want to open up. The article "Teens Are Wired... And, Yes, It's OK" by CBS News, states that teenagers cope with the ever growing technology, but sacrifice the way they live their life because they invest so much time into the media. Furthermore, sacrifices are made because the need for validation is not only in online social media, but everywhere in real life. People constantly want verbal validation for their skills in sports, just as much as for their written opinions online. Eventually there is no indication on where people's online lives ends and offline life begins. For a lot, going on facebook or MySpace is the first thing that they do when waking up, and the last thing they do before heading to bed.

Teenagers have the biological need to separate from their parents and their online life is the perfect way to do that. Additionally teenagers have the tendency to ignore or push away advice that their parents give them and when the lecture about privacy occurs, they will tend to ignore it even if it is for their own well-being. Even though parents know that this behavior is very bad for their children, it is hard for parents to stop it. They can spy on online conversations or keep track of websites their children are going on, but in either case, they will be infringing on the teenager privacy which most parents are reluctant to do.

Fortunately, teenagers use online social media less than the average young adult. Unfortunately, young adults are even worse off. Yet young adults have more sense of security and integrity, and can control their online usage in a safer way. And yet, even though people can stay safe online, there are still issues of security that social media users cannot control, but social media developers can control.

People go to one another not only for social validation, but also for knowledge. Using online social media is one of the easiest and fastest places to do this in modern society. Before, the online world was too vast for many people to understand, but with people constantly exploring and adapting to this new technology, it has spread fast. People using the Internet to find information are choosing the websites they look at as a source, and the programmer behind the website is their guide. Privacy must not be ignored when making websites, because even though people try to stay safe online, they do not often realize the ways they are putting themselves at risk. If the 'guide', or the programmer does not take the user's privacy into consideration when making their online social media site, privacy becomes an issue of safety. Having an awareness

of privacy is all it takes on the programmers' side of things, to provide protection for online users.

Users often share discussions or a variety of information on social networking websites, whether it is facebook, Twitter or YouTube. However whenever it comes to privacy implications, there is yet to be any sort of regulation that circles what the user can or cannot do. If for instance, we look at a popular social networking website such as facebook, there are serious flaws in the system regarding privacy concerns.

There are three distinctive factors with privacy on facebook according to Harvey Jones findings on "facebook: Threats to Privacy". The first is user disclosing too much information. Normally people would not tell anyone about their cell phone numbers in real life meetings, yet people would post their phone number on their profile of facebook. Secondly, facebook does not take any additional steps to help protect user privacy. By default whenever a user creates a new facebook account, the user publicly shares all their information. This starts the user off with a privacy risk, and is much like other online social networking services; they all share information publicly and are open to the web. The third risk is that third parties are actively seeking out end-user information using facebook. Since users have public access, and facebook is allowed to disclose user information when the user accepted its use-policy, third parties take advantage. Third parties such as marketers find the most benefits with facebook since they have access to a valuable source of demographic data, in which users tend to share their age, gender, locations, as well as likes and dislikes. A student survey finding of MIT students in Harvard by Jose Hiram Soltren is displayed in table 1.
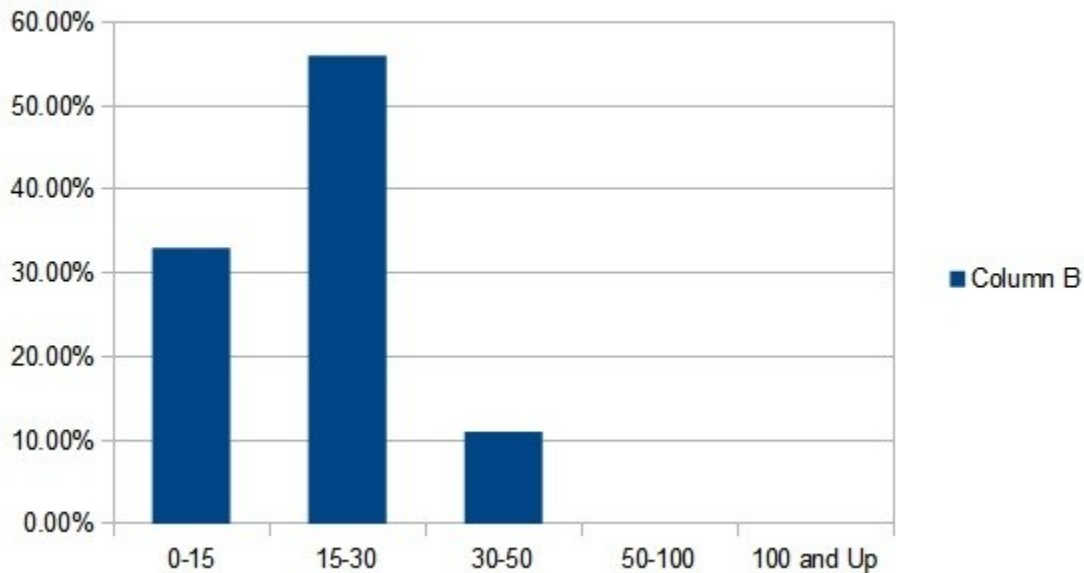
	Total number of users surveyed	Use Privacy Settings	Do not use
	389	234 (62%)	146 (38%)
Familiar with Privacy Setting feature on facebook	289 (74%)		
Not Familiar	100 (26%)		

Table 1.

The survey shows that there are a fair amount of users (74%) that are familiar with the privacy feature available on facebook.   However of 380 users who gave information regarding their use to the privacy setting only 62% use the feature.   The large amount of those who chose not to use the feature indicates that there is some sort of benefit for providing information and allowing others to see; or there is ignorance and people are unaware of such offers.   Further studies show that facebook users are not familiar with the terms of service and privacy policy.   Of 389 users, 353 (91%) did not read the terms of service or Privacy policy.   This may be the case of typical human nature where the user clicks on the check box just to proceed to what they intentionally wanted, to use the service and disregard the long lines of text in the text area.
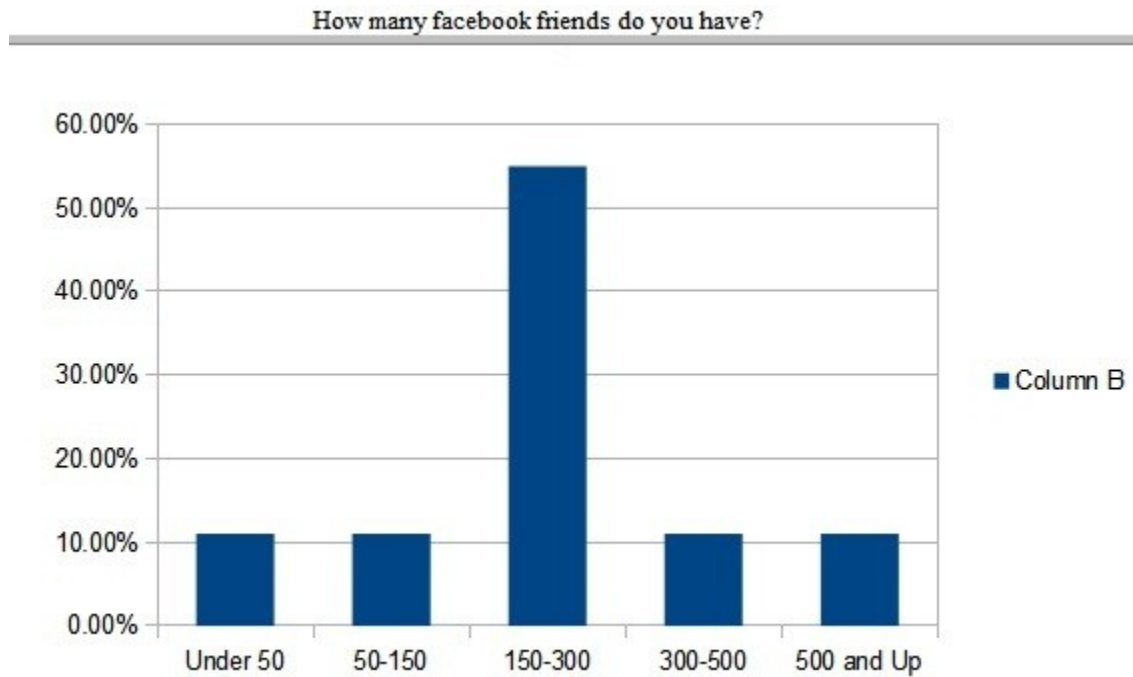
A survey consisting of five questions was asked to a number of people on facebook. The results are as follows.

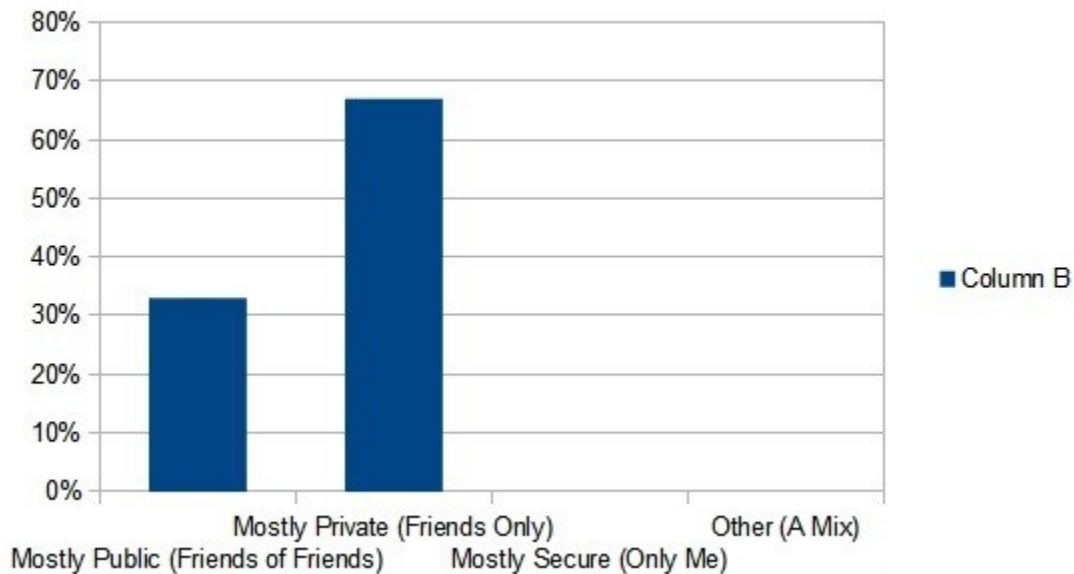How many of your facebook friends do you communicate with regularly in real life?

The first question was: how many of your facebook friends do you communicate with regularly in real life? This question breaks down to the social validation level, while seemingly being like a harmless question. If most people only communicate a small portion of their "facebook friends" regularly, why do they keep them? People obviously use facebook as a social networking site, so the more "friends" you have, the better, but unfortunately this is a fairly insecure way about treating your facebook profile. Having more than 80 percent of your facebook friend's list as people you do not talk to on a regular basis is an unsafe thing because not knowing where these "friends" are in their lives, means not knowing who they know. Going back to the first question, this question proves the point of why letting friends of friends have access to your personal information is very insecure. Not keeping in contact with the majority of your friends means that you don't know which friends they have added to their lists. Sure, there

7

needs to be some level of trust in society, and who better to trust then your friends, but people change, and trusting in your friends sense of trust in other people seems putting a lot into faith.

How many facebook friends do you have?

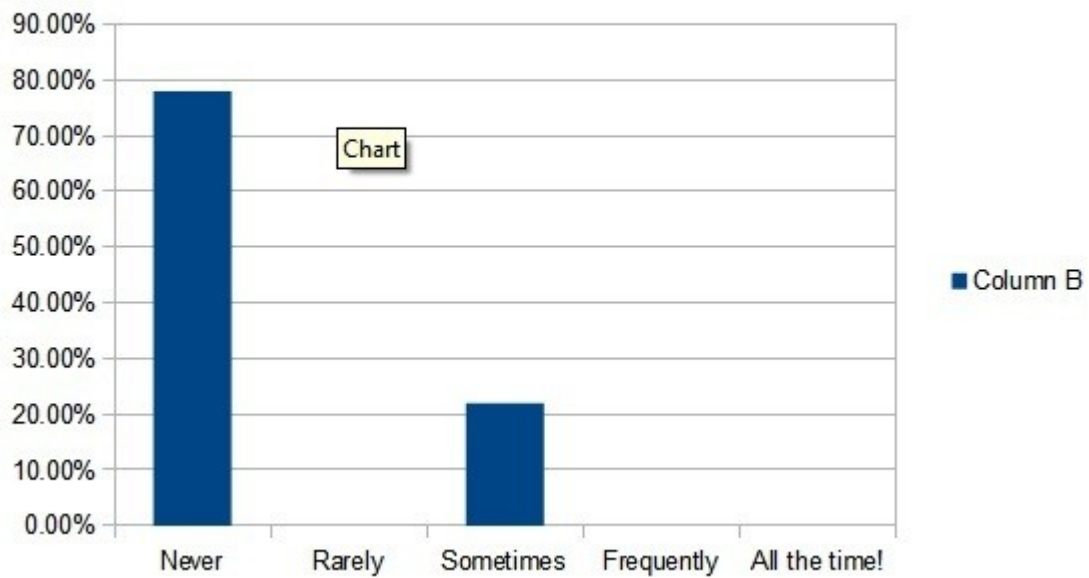|	
Under 50	11.00%
50-150	11.00%
150-300	55.00%
300-500	11.00%
500 and Up	11.00%

(Column B)

The second question was to see how many facebook friends the people who did the survey had. This question gives a fairly averaged outcome, where most people have between 150 and 300 "friends", and the rest are equally above and below this line.

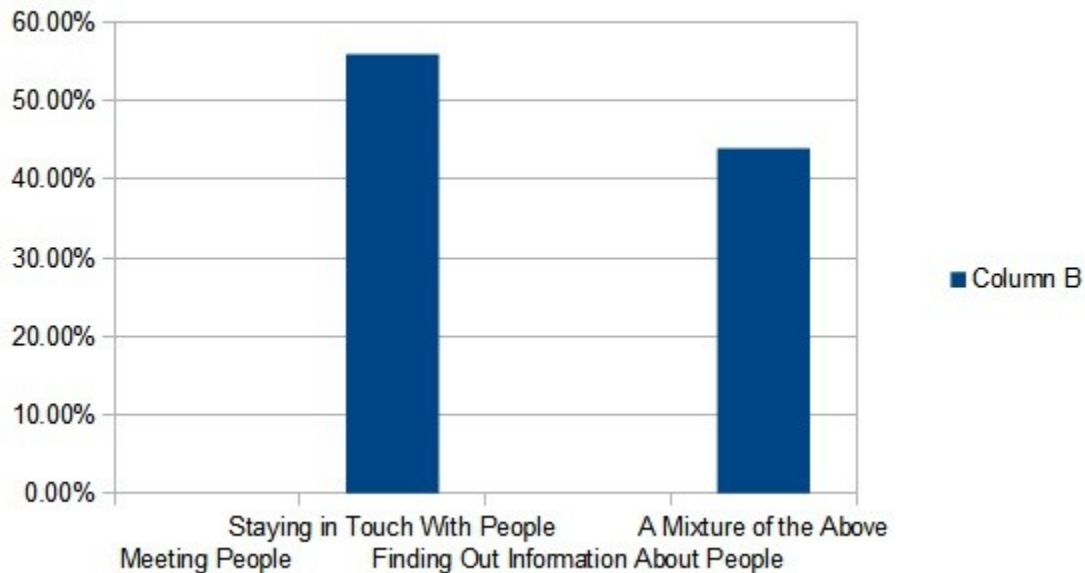What level of security do you use on facebook for your profile information?

The third question asked was: what level of security do you use on facebook for your profile

information? This question was asked in order to find out one thing: do people use their facebook

accounts in a safe and secure way. Almost 70 percent of the people surveyed allow access to

their friends only, which is definitely the most secure setting on facebook. About 30 percent

allow friends of their friends to view their profile information, which is not bad, but that extra

one degree of accessibility gives a lot of insecurity.

How often do you write on facebook where you are? ie. I'm at the bar, who wants to join?

The fourth question is seeing how often people give sensitive information away, which could lead to others finding them at wherever they say they are going to. Doing this on social networking sites is bad because people know when you are not at home. It's much safer for people to say what they have done, not what they are going to do.

Do you use facebook or other social networking websites as a way of mostly:

The fifth question asked how people normally use social networking websites. The response is that most people use facebook as a tool for staying in touch with people, and the rest it as a mixture of staying in touch with people, meeting people, and finding out information about other people. Combining the results of this question with the first question's results, it is true to say that, although people may not have a lot of people that they talk with in their normal lives on their facebook list, they still keep in touch with the rest of these people. Also, by asking this question, it was determined that plenty of people do not only use social networking as a way of keeping in touch with old friends, but also meeting new people, and finding out information about people. The latter is informally known as facebook "creeping".

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main reason why people sacrifice their privacy is because of the need to belong.   The social cage that humans have put themselves into, dictates that one must fit in among others, and to do so, one sacrifices privacy.   This, in turn, leads to people ignoring and not caring about security and privacy factors; thus ignoring the consequences of increased visibility on the Internet.   New users are prime targets to security vulnerabilities, as social most people skip over end user license agreements, and anything resembling these.   Also, security configuration usually requires more steps to setup, and new users, by default, do the less involving setup, and ignore privacy risks.

What we can take from these conclusions, is that the human populace is slowly moving into an era of increased trust in its fellow citizens, and decreased security risks in being less private.